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Joint PhD Research, at DTU and NTNU, on the Implementation of Sustainability Approaches in Companies

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Integrating sustainability considerations, in business is gaining increased attention due to concerns of policy-makers, other external stakeholders, and companies' own agendas related to strategic and market positioning interests. Thus, a growing number of companies currently work on the integration and implementation of sustainability criteria in design-related departments, product development processes, manufacturing and supply chain management, and many other decision-making contexts throughout the entire company. Although a plethora of support approaches and tools are available for companies, practice shows that the implementation process of sustainability approaches is not straightforward. In fact, many companies struggle to turn sustainability goals, commitments and single initiatives towards long-lasting approaches, integrated into daily-standard business practice. The current research lacks comprehensive reasoning and supportive evidence explaining why sustainability approaches may fail during the implementation phase. Similarly, no systemized and detailed recommendations on how to overcome whatever impedes the implementation are provided. The project explores the following assumption: when implementing a sustainability approach in a company, beyond the very issue of formalizing, quantifying and monitoring sustainability indicators, there is a need for consideration, context-wise prioritization and management of a certain set of dimensions, which are key to a successful long-term implementation. These dimensions may be related to both soft and hard systems and located both within and beyond the company boundaries. With two parallel PhD projects, this joint research is articulated around two main purposes: increasing the visibility of why it is so complex to make sustainability approaches in companies "fly" on the long term and providing recommendations to improving the implementation of sustainability approaches in companies. Both PhD students combine their efforts based on the complementary expertise of the Department of Product Design, NTNU, and the Division for Quantitative Sustainability Assessment division, DTU Management Engineering.

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